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Utah Valley Medical Community Comments

Herb Abuse Serious Problem

Editor's note: This is the fifth article in an ongoing series on the problems associated with drug addiction in Utah Valley. Professionals in the medical community discuss substance abuse and the combined efforts they are instigating to ward off ever-increasing drug usage.

by **LEANNE HOFFMANN**

Herald Staff Writer

an experiment conducted last year it was discovered that a substance (drug) advertisement came across the television screen averaging once every 17½ seconds.

This is a substance oriented society," explains Dr. Bruce Woolley, pharmacologist and director of the Brigham Young University Health Center. In a conference Tuesday at the Utah Valley Medical Center, a group of doctors convened to discuss the drug problems of the valley.

A great number of addicts not even aware they are addicts," said one doctor.

Another related the story of a man who had been told a substance was habit forming. "Why that's silly," he responded, "I've been taking it every day for 20 years and I'm not addicted."

Many who have drug problems simply do not realize it.

For example, explained Dr. Woolley, "there's no way for a person to get tired, yet every millions take Geritol for blood."

On this observation one doctor wondered aloud if he had quit taking it, clarifying the point was not necessary only the danger in the distance, but the danger in living all the hype of the advertising media.

In a poll taken by the National Drug Enforcement Agency, most American families say that they are not affected by drugs — 72 percent say "not at all." Only four percent say they are affected "very much." (It is undoubtedly more than this.)

In discussing the drug problems in the area, doctors acknowledged the reality of prescription drug abuse.

as serious and significant problem" is herb abuse.

"You can get as stoned and as dependent on herbs as on any synthetic drug," says Woolley. "I've had people tell me, 'When I take it, I feel close to God — I feel really good.'"

At this point, one doctor commented that he knows a man who goes out every morning, gathers weeds and grinds it up to make a "green drink."

carrot juice and yellow vegetables.

"He died," he added almost as an afterthought.

The local medical community is concerned with dealing with all aspects of drug-related illness.

Doctors pointed out that many patients need to go into detoxification — a program where they learn to eliminate their need for the drug. Some have severe physical problems while others battle with psychosis.

Those who have a substance abuse problem ultimately develop other problems.

"An abuse problem is almost never only a drug problem — and it's almost never only a one drug problem," clarified Romney.

Ignorance and apathy regarding the drug problem are major obstacles in effectively dealing with it. It's a sad reality that the "swinging fist" often must "smash an other's nose" before it receives the needed attention.

Ideally, it is the initial "swing" that should attract attention and instigate preventive measures.

Prevention is exactly the focus of drug specialists in Utah Valley.

For the past few months, this group of concerned doctors affiliated with the UVRMC has been discussing and organizing a program in conjunction with Brigham Young University to better deal with the area drug problem.

"Let's bring together all of the disciplines," says Woolley.

"Let's not focus only on treatment, but on success. And real success revolves around prevention. We want to come together and combine forces in order to come up with a wise, effective approach in dealing with substance abuse."



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Dr. Bruce Woolley

They point out that often the patient has up to 10 doctors who will all give the same prescription — allowing access to an abundance of the drug.

"There's really not a whole lot we can do," says Dr. Romney, Medical Director at UVRMC. "If we find out about it we can disassociate ourselves from the patient, but most often they'll just find another doctor."

Another real, and "every bit

"He has absolutely no idea what's in it," he says, "doing it exemplifies 'toughness' — like Rocky drinking the raw eggs." The specialists say the least detrimental thing that can come from going overboard on herbs is wasting money. The worst thing is getting poisoned.

"I had one patient," said one doctor, "who turned yellow. He just couldn't get off